



Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry



Padre Pio Newsletter • Issue 63

www.saintpio.org

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Padre Pio: Director of Souls – Part III

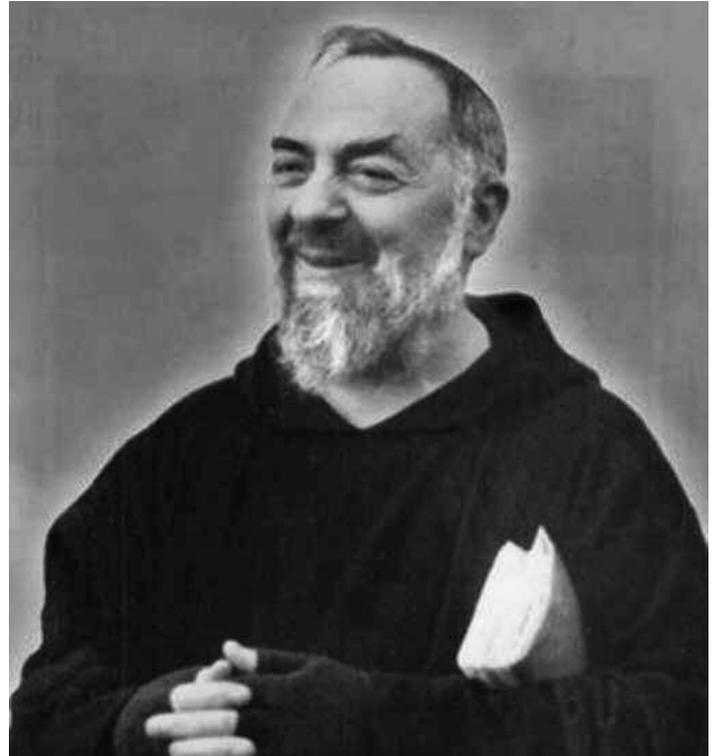
In this issue of our "Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry" newsletter, we have included a number of impressive testimonies regarding Padre Pio's gifts and abilities as a spiritual director par excellence.

There was once a man who lived in Rome (name withheld) who had fallen upon hard times. He had searched for work for months with no success. Because he was not able to support his wife and children, he felt like a total failure. Each day, his situation became more desperate. There would be an endless search for work. He would come home to his family with empty pockets and with no hope of finding employment. When he woke up each morning, he dreaded the new day.

One morning, the man's depression was so great that he could not think in a rational manner. He decided that it would be better to end his life. While his wife and two children were sleeping peacefully in another part of the house, he turned on the gas in the kitchen. He told himself that his problems would soon be over. Suddenly he heard his son calling his name and it caused him to come to his senses. He quickly turned off the gas and rushed to see what his little boy wanted. After he put his son back to bed, his eyes fell on the crucifix that was hanging on the wall. His wife had put it there. He felt that his wife was fortunate because she had a strong faith in God. He however, had no faith.

One day when the man was on a bus, he struck up a conversation with the person who was sitting next to him. That person happened to be the famous actor, Carlo Campanini. The man told Carlo about his many difficulties. Carlo asked him if he had ever heard of Padre Pio and the man replied that he had not. Carlo shared some facts about Padre Pio's life. He explained that Padre Pio was a very holy Capuchin priest and a great intercessor with the Lord. Carlo felt that Padre Pio would be able to help the man. He suggested that they go together to San Giovanni Rotondo to see Padre Pio and the man agreed to go.

On the way to San Giovanni Rotondo, the man wondered to himself why he had agreed to make the trip. He was not a person of faith. He had no interest in things of a religious nature. He couldn't imagine that he would enjoy spending time at a monastery. He also thought that it was very odd that Carlo Campanini would have such a strong religious inclination. Carlo had fame, fortune, friends, and the respect and admiration of millions. What would motivate him to have so much devotion to a Catholic priest?



The next morning the man went with Carlo to Padre Pio's Mass. It was the very first time he had ever attended Mass. He tried to follow along as best he could but he was not able to understand the formal prayers or the scripture readings. It was all new to him. He could not grasp it. When the others in the congregation knelt down, he followed suit. When they stood up, he stood up. He tried to say the name Jesus. For the duration of the Mass he kept repeating the name Jesus. It was his only prayer.

After Mass, the man went into the sacristy with a number of others in order to receive Padre Pio's blessing. Padre Pio was walking toward the fountain in the sacristy to wash his hands when he noticed the man. Padre Pio looked at him with a penetrating gaze and then smiled at him. The man felt an instant connection. He could not explain it, but for some strange reason, it seemed as though Padre Pio had been expecting him.

Later on in the afternoon, the man saw Padre Pio again and was able to speak to him. "I do not believe in God," the man said to Padre Pio. "That is not true," Padre Pio replied. "There was a time when you did not believe in God. But that was in the past. As for now, you do believe." Padre Pio then took the man to his cell and heard his confession. The man told Padre Pio that he did not know how to pray and Padre Pio gave him

simple instructions in prayer. The man still felt a sense of guilt and shame over the sins of his past and he told Padre Pio so. "Do you think that St. Peter will want to know about this when you go to heaven?" Padre Pio asked. "Of course he will not!" Padre Pio added. He then gave the man a fatherly embrace. The darkness and the pain that had been in his heart for years, suddenly vanished. Unashamedly, he began to cry. When he left the monastery, he had one last coin in his pocket. He gave it to a beggar who was standing nearby. He was now completely penniless but ironically, he felt freer than he had in years.

When the man returned to Rome, he was faithful to attend Mass every Sunday with his wife and children. He asked for instruction and was taught how to use the Missal in order to follow the prayers and readings of the Mass. He still had many difficulties to face in his life, but he no longer felt hopeless. His new found faith gave him the light he needed to see each day to its completion and to give thanks to God for blessings received.

Dr. Ezio Saltamerenda was the director of the Biotherapeutic Institute in Genoa, Italy. Ezio had been an atheist from the time he was a teenager. As the years passed, he felt an ever greater hostility toward religion and looked with disdain on people who believed in God. Ezio felt that it was his duty to convince people that religion was for the weak and feeble minded.

On one occasion, Ezio was introduced to an industrialist from Genoa, Mario Cavaliere. Mario happened to be a spiritual son of Padre Pio. In Mario's office, Ezio noticed a photograph of Padre Pio on the desk. As he glanced at the photograph, he felt a strange tightness in his throat. Mario noticed Ezio staring at the photo and told him some brief facts about Padre Pio's life.

Even though priests and clergymen were not people that Dr. Ezio admired or respected, the words that Mario spoke about Padre Pio made a deep impression on him. The next morning, he felt an overwhelming urge to meet Padre Pio. He could not understand where the desire was coming from but he felt powerless to resist it. He left for San Giovanni Rotondo that very evening.

When he arrived at the monastery of Our Lady of Grace, he was told to wait for Padre Pio in the sacristy. When Padre Pio walked into the sacristy, Ezio felt the same tightness in his throat that he had felt when he saw Padre Pio's picture for the first time. Suddenly, without having any idea why, Ezio felt like crying.

Ezio was informed that the only way he could speak to Padre Pio was if he made his confession to him. He decided to wait in the confessional line. When it was his turn, he explained to Padre Pio that he wanted to ask him for a blessing for a relative who was sick. He did not want to make his confession. Padre Pio had a severe expression on his face and said to him, "Do you ever think of the state of your soul?" "Yes, I do think

of the state of my soul," Ezio replied. Padre Pio then asked him what he believed the purpose of life was. "The purpose of life is the preservation of the species," Ezio replied. Padre Pio told Ezio that his soul was in a dreadful state and then he asked him to leave the confessional. Ezio tried to stand up but for some strange reason he felt riveted to the ground. He was completely confused. Finally, he managed to leave the confessional.

Even though Ezio's first encounter with Padre Pio had not gone well, he wanted to see him again. He wondered what the second encounter would be like. Fighting the fear in his heart, he gathered up his courage and returned the next day. He tried to be as inconspicuous as possible as he stood in the corridor among a group of men who were waiting for Padre Pio. When Padre Pio saw Ezio, he said to him, "Man from Genoa, you live near the seaside but you do not know how to wash. You have a dirty face!" Then he added, "You are a strong boat without a captain." Once again, he asked him to leave.

All of the men who were waiting in line had heard Padre Pio's words. Ezio felt the embarrassment of being humiliated in public. In his heart, he felt a great anguish. He went for a walk in an open field near the monastery. He tried to clear his mind and to think about what he should do next. He was hurt by Padre Pio's coldness, but it only made him long with a greater intensity to be near him. He told one of the other Capuchins all that had happened. The Capuchin was very kind to Ezio and tried to encourage him. He took him to Padre Pio's cell. As they entered the cell, Ezio became aware of the beautiful fragrance of violets. When Padre Pio saw Ezio, he told him to go downstairs and wait for him. He would come down soon to hear his confession.

Ezio made a sincere confession and he cried unashamedly throughout. Later he was to say that making his confession to Padre Pio was the most beautiful moment of his life. His previous encounters with Padre Pio had been painful, no doubt, but that was all in the past. After he received absolution, he spoke to Padre Pio from his heart and said, "I hope that the sorrow that I have felt for my sins and also my conversion to the faith has been of some consolation to you." "My son," Padre Pio replied lovingly, "Indeed, it has been a great consolation to me. God bless you always." Later he told Ezio that he would always be with him in spirit.

Ezio had not been mistaken. Padre Pio had called him "my son." Ezio's heart was bursting with joy. When Dr. Ezio Saltamerenda returned to his home in Genoa, he was a changed man. It was the beginning of a completely different life for him, and he shared his new found faith with everyone.

Giuseppe Minto of Milan, Italy was a Camilian friar of the Institute of St. Camillo of Alberoni. The members of his religious congregation cared for the sick and infirm. One of the sick patients that Giuseppe was assisting, spoke to him about Padre Pio and encouraged him to visit San Giovanni Rotondo.

Giuseppe was finally able to make the trip in March 1959. When he met Padre Pio and kissed his hand, he perceived a beautiful fragrance which he described as a mixture of roses, incense, and carbolic acid. He also had the opportunity to assist as altar server at Padre Pio's Mass on several occasions. During the Mass, just before the Eucharistic prayer, as Giuseppe poured water over Padre Pio's wounded hands, he felt immensely blessed.

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Each week we post inspirational stories of Padre Pio and those whose lives he touched, on our Facebook and Google + pages:



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Padre Pio Devotions

After the Mass, Padre Pio made his thanksgiving behind a curtain. Giuseppe happened to look past the curtain and he was able to see Padre Pio clearly. In his hand, he had a large stack of letters from people requesting his prayers. Padre Pio's lips were moving and he was gesturing as though he was talking to someone, but there was no one there. Giuseppe understood then that Padre Pio was speaking to God.

Giuseppe waited in the sacristy to make his confession to Padre Pio. He sat on a bench with many other men. Near him was an engineer, who was so frightened at the prospect of making his confession to Padre Pio that he was trembling. Giuseppe felt sorry for him and tried to say a word to console him. When the engineer's turn came, he started to walk toward the confessional but was so overcome by emotion and fear that he fell to the floor. Padre Pio was very loving. He encouraged the man to step forward and he pointed him to the kneeler.

Once, when Giuseppe was making his confession to Padre Pio, he began speaking about something that was totally unrelated to the matter at hand. Padre Pio stopped him short. "There is no time to lose, my son," Padre Pio said. He did not want to waste a minute. Before Giuseppe left San Giovanni Rotondo to return to Milan, he asked Padre Pio to give him a word to take back to the other priests and brothers in his religious congregation. "Say this to your brothers," Padre Pio replied. "Let us sanctify ourselves and treat the sick well. Let us live well and we will bring upon ourselves the blessings of the Lord."

Romana Bianchi had been suffering from arthritis of the spine for several years. She was in constant pain and no medicine that the doctor prescribed brought her any relief. She spent most of her time in bed, hardly able to move. Romana had a husband and three children to care for but it became increasingly difficult for her to see to the needs of her family. She decided to make a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo to visit Padre Pio and to ask him to pray that her health would be restored. She also had another special intention. Romana's father-in-law lived in her household and their relationship was very strained. Romana hoped that they could resolve their problems so that peace would return to the home. It was a situation that needed prayer.

Romana traveled from her home in Gemona del Friuli in northeastern Italy to San Giovanni Rotondo. The year was 1963. In the confessional, Padre Pio asked Romana if she went to Mass on Sundays. She told him that she did not. Next, he asked her if she had gone to Mass on Easter Sunday. Again, she said no. Padre Pio became upset and raised his voice in disapproval.

Romana was not put off by Padre Pio's strong words, nor was she intimidated by his sternness. She did what very few people had the courage to do. She spoke up to him. "Listen, I am desperate," Romana said to Padre Pio. "If I was not desperate, I would never have traveled such a long distance from one end of Italy to the other in order to see you. I am here because I need help. My heart feels like ice. For a long time, I have been on the point of giving up completely. I have been so sick that I cannot even pray."

Romana's words caused Padre Pio's attitude to soften. She continued with her confession. When she was finished, Padre Pio gave her absolution. When he said, "Go in peace," a great peace filled Romana's heart. She went back to Gemona del Friuli, healed in

body and also in spirit. The chronic pain left her and never returned. She felt like her old self again. Not only that, her relationship with her father-in-law improved dramatically. Peace was restored to their relationship and she grew to have a deep affection for him. In the last years of his life, when he became bedridden, Romana cared for him lovingly and considered it a privilege.

Probo Vaccarini traveled from his home in Rimini to San Giovanni Rotondo in order to make his confession to Padre Pio. Eight of Probo's friends asked him to speak to Padre Pio on their behalf. Probo decided that the best way to present his friends' prayer petitions to Padre Pio was to write them out on a single piece of paper.

While making his confession to Padre Pio, Probo kept thinking about the note in his pocket with the petitions on it. He wondered when would be the appropriate time for him to talk to Padre Pio about his friends' needs. Padre Pio noticed Probo's restlessness. After Padre Pio gave him absolution, he said to him, "I want you to leave now!" "But wait," Probo said. "Eight of my friends would like you to pray for their intentions. I have their names and their petitions which they have asked me to relay to you." "You should not be thinking about your friends while you are in the confessional," Padre Pio replied. "If you do not leave at once, I will."

Padre Pio stood up and made a motion to leave. A strange feeling suddenly came over Probo. He felt rooted to his place. He could not move. He could not have left the confessional if he had wanted to. Padre Pio seemed to be aware of how uncomfortable Probo felt. He once again took his seat. "Go ahead and ask me what you want to regarding your friends," Padre Pio said. Probo took the paper with the petitions on it out of his pocket. It was completely blank. "You must hurry," Padre Pio said. "There are many other people who are waiting in line to make their confession. We do not have any time to lose." "I don't understand what happened," Probo replied. "The paper that I wrote the petitions on is now blank!" He noticed that Padre Pio had a broad grin on his face.

Padre Pio then proceeded to make seven statements. Each statement was an accurate reference to the petitions of Probo's seven friends. Probo wondered why Padre Pio had only addressed the needs of seven of his friends when it was actually eight who made the request. As it turned out, the person that Padre Pio omitted, had the opportunity to go to San Giovanni Rotondo and speak for himself.

On one occasion, **Padre Pio was in the choir loft** of the church, making his thanksgiving after Mass. Brother Costantino approached him and told him that there was a man downstairs in the church who wanted to make his confession. He asked Padre Pio if it would be all right if he brought the man up to the choir loft so that he could make his confession. Padre Pio made no reply. Brother Costantino waited for a time and finally went back downstairs.

Padre Pio Devotions Books

Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry: True Stories of Padre Pio Book I
Pray, Hope, and Don't Worry: True Stories of Padre Pio Book II
written by Diane Allen and available at amazon.com

A few moments later Brother Costantino returned to the choir loft. "Padre Pio," Brother Costantino said, "The man who wants to make his confession to you is still downstairs. He cannot wait any longer. He is a chauffeur and there are people calling for him to drive them to their destinations." "That man has made the Lord wait for twenty-five years," Padre Pio said. "He can wait five minutes for me to finish my prayers!"

Brother Costantino was not sure what Padre Pio was talking about. He went downstairs for the second time. The man was still standing in the corridor. "I have to leave now," the man said impatiently. "I cannot wait a minute longer. Besides that, I am afraid to make my confession to Padre Pio." "Why are you afraid?" Brother Costantino asked. "I am afraid because it has been twenty-five years since my last confession."

Umberto Iorio once traveled from Morcone to San Giovanni Rotondo in order to make his confession to Padre Pio. He was twenty-five years old. "Do you go to Mass?" Padre Pio asked. "I attend Mass once in awhile," Umberto replied. "Why do you live in the desert?" Padre Pio asked him, referring to the way he was neglecting his spiritual life. "You must start going to Mass and then you can come back and I will hear your confession," Padre Pio said.

Umberto got up casually from the kneeler. With a nonchalant attitude, he walked out of the confessional. From all appearances, he seemed to be completely indifferent to what Padre Pio had said to him. As soon as he left the church and walked out into the open air, he began to sob. As though a light had been turned on inside his mind, he suddenly understood the error of his ways. He felt a deep remorse. After that brief encounter with Padre Pio, Umberto never missed Mass again.

Cornelia Zolezzi of Chiavari, Italy had a pressing problem in her life and took a trip to San Giovanni Rotondo in hopes of speaking to Padre Pio about it. Cornelia owned an apartment in Chiavari and when she made a temporary move to Florence, she sublet her apartment to a woman whom she thought would be an ideal tenant. Later, when Cornelia was returning to Chiavari to take up residence, she gave the woman advanced notice to vacate the apartment. However, the woman refused to leave. Cornelia had no choice but to move back into her apartment while her tenant was still occupying it. It soon became an intolerable situation. Cornelia had no privacy and as time passed, she grew more and more unhappy about the situation.

At the time of Cornelia's visit, people were not allowed to make their confession to Padre Pio if it had been less than a week since their last confession. There was sound logic behind the rule. Considering the ever-growing number of people who flocked to Padre Pio's confessional, the long lines and the long wait became unmanageable.

Cornelia knew that she was breaking the rules when she stood in the women's line for Padre Pio's confessional. She had been to confession just a few days previously. However, she was so distraught about her living situation that she was willing to take her chances in order to speak to Padre Pio.

Cornelia walked into Padre Pio's confessional and knelt down. "You are in the grace of God," he said to her, indicating

that she had recently made her confession and that all was well. He would not hear her confession. Cornelia was disappointed but there was nothing she could do.

When Cornelia returned to Chiavari, she was very surprised to find that her tenant had moved out of the apartment. One of the neighbors told Cornelia that a moving van had arrived in front of the apartment in the morning. After all of the woman's furniture and personal belongings were loaded into the moving van, the driver and the woman left together. When Cornelia inquired as to the time that the woman left, her neighbor told her that she left at about 8:30 a.m. That was the same time that Cornelia had knelt before Padre Pio in the confessional.

There was a man once who entered Padre Pio's confessional and found it to be a very disheartening experience. The year was 1963. Padre Pio did not even permit the man to kneel down, but instead asked him to leave at once. The man felt insulted. He went to one of the other Capuchins and told him what had happened and how upset he was. "Padre Pio treated you that way because he cares about you," the Capuchin told him. "He wants you to change your life and to save your soul." The Capuchin then heard the man's confession and gave him absolution. He counseled the man and told him that it was very important for him to get his life back on the spiritual track. He noticed that in many ways, the man's ideas about religion were very shallow. He knew very little about his Catholic faith.

Unfortunately, the man did not heed the Capuchin's advice and continued to live a sinful life. He betrayed his family's trust and on many occasions was dishonest in his business practices. However, after meeting Padre Pio, something slowly started to change within him. He visited San Giovanni Rotondo on seven more occasions but always made sure that he kept a good distance from Padre Pio's confessional. Once had been enough.

Through his visits to the monastery, the man learned of Padre Pio's daily schedule. He knew that Padre Pio passed through the St. Francis hall each day after hearing the women's confessions. One day, he had a great desire to see Padre Pio. He did not want to speak to him. He simply wanted to see him.

The man went to the St. Francis hall and stood in a corner so that he would not be noticed. He did not want to attract any attention to himself. Padre Pio soon came out of the elevator and entered the St. Francis hall. Although many people surrounded him, he kept his arms folded across his chest so that no one could kiss his hands.

The man was surprised to see that Padre Pio had spotted him standing in the corner and was staring at him. Padre Pio then walked directly over to him and stretched out his hand. The man was very happy for the opportunity to kiss Padre Pio's hand. Padre Pio then blessed him. The man could not believe his good fortune.

One day, the man gathered enough courage to return to Padre Pio's confessional. He spoke to Padre Pio from his heart. He told Padre Pio that he had been trying to overcome the sins in his life but had not been able to completely free himself from them. "But is that not repentance?" Padre Pio said to him lovingly. Padre Pio's encouraging words filled the man with hope. He made a good confession and felt truly blessed to receive absolution from Padre Pio.